

THE COLLECTING AND DRYING OF PLANTS

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It is proposed to form a Herbarium in the Society's Museum ; and in order that it should be thoroughly representative it is hoped that members will make collections in as many different parts of the Protectorate as possible.

It is absolutely essential for the determination of any species that the specimens collected should show all the growing parts, i.e. stem, leaves, flowers and fruit, and with each specimen should be a note recording the locality, approximate altitude, season of flowering ; whether herb, bush, tree or climber, &c. ; also, whenever possible, the vernacular name and any uses the plant may be put to by the natives, or any superstition that may be attached to it should be recorded.

Every endeavour will be made to identify any specimens sent in by members, but it must be borne in mind that the Flora of Tropical Africa is as yet but little known and a very great number of our common plants, grasses, and ferns have not yet been described or been named.

It is therefore necessary to send duplicate specimens of nearly all plants collected to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, for identification.

Below is given the ' Hints for Collecting and Drying Plants ' issued from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

' HINTS FOR COLLECTING AND DRYING PLANTS

' In preserving plants for permanent collections, the object is to prepare specimens in such a manner that they may be thoroughly dried, the colours as far as possible retained, and such a degree of pressure given that they do not curl up in drying. For this purpose a quantity of paper is necessary, brown or stout grey, moderately absorbent, of ordinary demy size (17 inches by 11) when folded.

' Two boards (or better, stout frames of wire-grating) are requisite, of the size of the paper, one for the top, the other

for the bottom of each mass of papers. Pieces of millboard placed between the papers, if the specimens are numerous or particularly thick or woody, are very useful. For pressure nothing is better than a heavy weight on the topmost board, or, while travelling, two leathern straps and buckles to bind the boards and papers transversely. Thus provided, gather your specimens—if small, root and stem ; if large, cut off portions of the branches, a foot or rather more in length, always selecting those in flower and in more or less advanced state of fruit. Long, slender plants, as grasses, sedges, and many ferns, may be doubled once or twice. Place them, before they wither, side by side, but never one upon the other on the same sheet, taking care that the thick parts of the specimens are, as far as possible, distributed to different parts of the sheet, and lay over the specimens one, two, three or more sheets of paper, according to its thickness or the thickness of your plants ; and so on, layer above layer of paper and specimens, subjecting them to pressure. In a day or two, according to the more or less succulent nature of the plants, or to the nature of the climate, remove them successively into fresh papers till the moisture is absorbed, and dry the spare papers in the sun or by a fire for future use.

‘Circumstances permitting, succulent plants should be placed in a separate press, otherwise the complete drying of others is retarded. When practicable, very delicate flowers should be separately dried and preserved in blotting or other soft paper and subsequently added to the specimen of the rest of the plant.

‘When sufficiently dry, the specimens should be put into papers, one sheet (more if the specimens be thick) between each layer of plants ; and thus a great many may be safely arranged in a small compass, and are ready for transport covered with oilcloth or packed in boxes. Mosses and other cryptogamic plants may be generally dried in the common way, those which grow in tufts being previously opened out, so as to form neat specimens. Most seaweeds require a slight washing in fresh water, and the more delicate kinds should be floated out on sheets of writing paper before being subjected to pressure.’